



Gypsy Moth Abatement Planned for April 2015

Proposal to spray for gypsy moths northeast of Yacolt

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) has detected a non-native, invasive population of European gypsy moth in an area approximately 1.5 miles northeast of the town of Yacolt, Clark County. As a result, WSDA is proposing aerial spraying beginning in late April 2015 in an effort to eradicate these highly destructive pests. WSDA will soon begin a public information campaign in the Yacolt area to inform citizens of this proposal. For more information on the proposal, contact 1-800-443-6684 or visit <http://agr.wa.gov/plantsinsects/insectpests/gypsymoth/default.aspx>

Why are gypsy moths a problem?

Gypsy moth caterpillars can damage and kill trees and shrubs by eating leaves and needles. One of America's worst forest pests, they have defoliated millions of acres of trees in the eastern U.S. Gypsy moths can spread widely in a region, and infestations can cause extensive environmental and economic damage by destroying forests, orchards, and residential trees. Gypsy moths could cause significant trade restrictions if they become established in Washington.

How are gypsy moths controlled?

Washington State uses an integrated pest management approach to control gypsy moths. This includes:

- Extensive monitoring with pheromone traps.
- Visual inspection for egg masses to determine where a breeding population is located.
- Manual destruction of egg masses.
- Targeted control for caterpillars with least toxic methods effective for the site. Btk is the most commonly used product for gypsy moth control in Washington.
- Follow-up trapping to evaluate success of eradication.

What is Btk?

Btk, or *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki*, is a naturally occurring bacteria found in soil. It is used in a commercially produced pesticide (Foray) that is sprayed on tree and plant foliage to control caterpillars. After caterpillars eat the sprayed leaves, the Btk Spores become activated and produce proteins that damage their digestive systems causing the caterpillars to stop eating and die. The digestive systems of humans and other mammals differ from caterpillars, and as a result, the proteins do not harm them. Btk is thus specifically toxic for caterpillars but not toxic for people, other mammals, birds, fish, or insects such as honeybees, beetles, and spiders.

Because of its safety and effectiveness, Btk is extensively used in organic agriculture and is available in many home gardening products. Treated vegetables and fruits may be picked a few hours after spraying, and washed and consumed thereafter. On commercial farms, agricultural workers are permitted to re-enter fields four hours following Btk treatment, and crops can be harvested the same day they are treated.

What are the human health concerns of Btk?

Btk isn't considered toxic for people and is not known to cause disease in humans. It doesn't harm water supplies. Human infections of Btk have been looked for but have not been seen in several large studies of people who lived in sprayed areas.

Many years of experience with Btk products have shown that the vast majority of people living in sprayed areas report no symptoms. A study of children with asthma living in the aerial spray zone for Btk revealed no harmful effects. A small number of people have reported symptoms including skin rash, irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat, and worsening of asthma or allergies after spraying. It isn't clear whether Btk was responsible for the symptoms or if the symptoms were related to disturbed dust and pollens or another component of the spray.

How do I minimize exposure to Btk?

Even though Btk has an excellent safety record, as a precaution, Public Health recommends that people in the spray area minimize their exposure as follows:

- Remain indoors for at least 30 minutes after the spraying. It's a good idea to keep pets inside too.
- Children should wait until the spray has dried on grass and shrubs before playing outside and should wash their hands after playing outside. Gardeners should follow the same precautions.
- If you get wet spray on your skin, wash with soap and water. If wet materials get into the eyes, flush them with water for 15 minutes.

People who are more susceptible to infections or respiratory irritation should pay particular attention to these precautions. This includes people with leukemia, AIDS or other immune system deficiency, people receiving radiation or chemotherapy treatment, and people with asthma, emphysema, or allergic sensitivities. People with concerns related to Btk exposure or their immune system should contact their health care provider.

More information

- For more information about the Gypsy Moth Eradication Project, including dates of spray applications, call the Washington State Department of Agriculture's Plant Protection Hotline at 1-800-443-6684. You may also request to be notified by telephone or e-mail the day before any scheduled spray application. <http://agr.wa.gov/plantsinsects/insectpests/gypsymoth/default.aspx>
- Washington State Department of Health: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Pests/GypsyMoths>
- Public Health Seattle/King County: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ehs/gypsymoths.aspx>
- Contact Clark County Public Health at (360) 397-8000; Public.Health@clark.wa.gov